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University of Alberta

Henry Fielding and the Nature of Ideal Womanhood

by

Danielle Leanne Frederickson

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Department of English

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall 1995

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To Mom, Dad, and my dear husband, Chris.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploration of Henry Fielding's unconventional and relatively liberated treatment of his female protagonists in the novels Tom Jones and Amelia. While I make no claim that Fielding is a feminist, I wish to re-examine the common contention that he is a masculinist. I have chosen Tom Jones and Amelia for study because the heroines in these novels are the most highly developed of Fielding's female characters, and further because, by realizing many of the traits Fielding thought most admirable in and necessary to humanity, they most fully express his willingness to examine and redefine conventional sexual roles.

My thesis consists of two chapters. The first chapter deals with Sophia Western in Tom Jones, and explores her as a comic character, as a moral being accorded free will, and finally, as the novel's embodiment of wisdom and maturity. The second chapter concerns Amelia Booth, the heroine of Amelia. Recognizing that the world in Amelia is a problematical place where people's actions, intentions and interactions with society are often misguided and confused, I try to determine the heroine's role within this novel. My object in both chapters is to discover how vital a role the heroines play, and to discuss if Fielding's idealized portrayal of his female protagonists renders them static and stereotypical, or if they surpass conventional conceptions of excellence in order to epitomize a better humanity.

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INTRODUCTION

Because Henry Fielding is best known as an author of comic novels which present the moral growth of male protagonists, feminist critics frequently charge that he concerns himself with male subjects and interests at the expense of exploring female issues. Such critics contend that the female characters in his writings are nothing more than minor figures resigned to passive, exemplary, roles, or even that they are stereotypes, embodying "some of the most common of the [anti-feminist] myths ... [such as] the permissive female or whore, the powerful Amazon, the learned lady, the ideal woman, [and] the angel" (Nussbaum 4). The popular image of Fielding as a masculinist who limits his female characters to conventional, one-dimensional roles, and who writes solely for a male audience is reinforced by Margaret Anne Doody, who comments,

> In the works of Fielding ... interest is centred on the hero and the point of view is entirely masculine; the use of picaresque tale and epic reference precludes the delicate unfolding of psychological analysis in which [his]

> humbler predecessors in English fiction delighted. (24)

Doody's point is clear: the reader is not to expect any great psychological insight from Fielding, a man born into the upper classes, granted a classical education, and therefore representative of the mainstream of eighteenth-century male society. Furthermore, his use of inherently "masculine" forms of writing--such as the picaresque tale, epic reference, "[t]he objective and rational view, ... deliberate social comment, broad perspective, and balanced wit," which Doody claims are so representative of the "central tradition"(17)--supposedly renders his works too disparate from the more "delicate" female forms of address to express the viewpoints of women.

Henry Fielding's fall from critical favour during this last half-century owes much to current critical assumptions concerning his "masculinism": his moral and artistic vision have been declared to be incompatible with present-day interests and concerns (most notably, feminism), and his female characters have generally been dismissed as unsympathetic, unrealistic, and unimportant. Not all feminist critics, however, maintain that Fielding portrays women unfavourably, or that his writing is shallow and

patriarchal; although no one denies that Henry Fielding was morally conservative,--a man who believed that every person had a place within the community and a responsibility to uphold that position--more critics are beginning to explore the possibility that this need not imply anti-feminism or misogyny. In her book Fielding and the Woman Question, Angela Smallwood has recently argued that Fielding actually liberates his female characters from conduct-book models of behaviour in order to advance his cherished ideals of rational benevolence, and to reflect his concerns as a moralist. She points out that although he initially adhered to conventional Restoration models of writing, Fielding's artistic vision matured throughout his career--leading beyond the "Shamelas" and "Fannys,"[1] whose very names suggest caricature and one-dimensionality--until his female characters became quite exceptional. By exploring, in individual chapters, the roles of Sophia Western and Amelia Booth in the novels Tom Jones and Amelia, I also hope to engage with and refute some of the current critical assumptions about Henry Fielding's "masculinism"; I hope to show how vital a role the heroines play in these two novels

---

[1]Shamela is Fielding's scheming parody of Samuel Richardson's Pamela in An Apology for the Life of Mrs Shamela Andrews, and Fanny is the hero's innocent love-interest in Joseph Andrews.

and to emphasize how Fielding, as a moralist, attempts to present through them a new ideal of humanity.

In The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art, Martin Battestin states that

> To grasp the moral implications of satire, we must hold in mind two distinct thematic layers that function concomitantly: a thesis attacking vice and folly, and an antithesis comprising a positive ethical alternative, the standard against which the satirized are measured. (52)

The reader is called upon to recognize that as a moralist and satirist, Fielding constantly compares the apparent vice of the world around him to a "positive ethical alternative," ... i.e., the way things, and people, *ought* to be. In order to expose the vanity and folly of his society, he therefore measures his characters against a proposed standard for virtuous human behaviour. Sophia Western and Amelia Booth function as Fielding's most mature and impressive standards of morality, acting not only as models of proper female behaviour, but as people who must consciously determine to conduct themselves virtuously and with integrity. It is important to note that Amelia and Sophia are not stereotypes themselves: they have been emancipated from eighteenth-century society's sexual double standard, and, as Smallwood argues, frequently defy

conventional notions concerning female roles by setting aside the dictates of fashionable society. By portraying Sophia and Amelia as "positive ethical alternatives" to what he considered to be his society's often perverted values, Fielding rejects conventional expectations of women and embraces a new vision of real virtue and self-awareness; he increasingly recognizes that women, as well as men, are moral creatures with a responsibility to think and act for themselves. Sophia Western and Amelia Booth seem to me to represent Fielding's most attractive and profound examples of a reformed humanity. I have chosen Amelia and Tom Jones for study, because the female protagonists in these two novels are the most highly developed of Fielding's female characters, and further because, by realizing many of the traits Henry Fielding thought most admirable in and necessary to humanity, they most fully express his willingness to examine and redefine conventional sexual roles.

THE DIVINE SOPHY

> Hushed be every ruder Breath! May the Heathen Ruler of the Winds confine in iron Chains the boisterous Limbs of noisy *Boreas*, and the sharp-pointed Nose of bitter-biting *Eurus*. Do thou, sweet *Zephyrus*, rising from thy fragrant bed, mount the western Sky, and lead on those delicious Gales, the Charms of which call forth the lovely *Flora* from her Chamber, perfumed with pearly dews, when on the first of *June*, her Birth-day, the blooming Maid, in loose Attire, gently trips it over the verdant Mead, where every Flower rises to do her Homage, till the whole Field becomes enamelled, and Colours contend with Sweets which shall ravish her most.
>
> So charming may she now appear; and you the feather'd Choristers of Nature ... tune your melodious Throats, to celebrate her Appearance. From Love proceeds your Music, and to Love it returns. Awaken therefore that gentle Passion in every Swain: for lo! adorned with all the Charms in which Nature can array her; bedecked with Beauty, Youth, Sprightliness, Innocence, Modesty, and Tenderness, breathing Sweetness from her rosy Lips, and darting Brightness from her sparkling Eyes, the lovely *Sophia* comes. (Tom Jones 154-45)

So Henry Fielding, in this famous passage, marks the advent of Sophia Western, the heroine of Tom Jones. And with this salutation the critical contention surrounding the nature of her character, and Fielding's ability to represent a

sympathetic, active, and virtuous female figure, begins. From the moment the reader is first introduced, by this glorious passage, to Sophia, he is made to realize that she is an idealized female character. Indeed, the narrator implies that she rivals the goddesses of Love and Spring, that she is a being with whom all sensible males should fall in love, and that she is a creature of utter beauty and grace. The catalogue of her virtues is imposing. Perhaps more important, in the eyes of today's critics, her powers are great: Nature bows before her, and humanity seems expected to follow. She seems perfect. But is Fielding serious in such a representation of his heroine? Does he honestly believe her to be so sublime? If he does, is he simply misguided in applying such a polished and elegant panegyric to a female character of her at-times-controversial ingredients? Certainly, many of Henry Fielding's contemporaries considered his delineation of Sophia Western problematic, even immoral. Such is the opinion of the critic `Orbilius,' who takes exception to Fielding's introduction of her in *An Examen of the History of Tom Jones, A Foundling*:

> *Sophia* is with great Pomp introduced to the Veneration of the Reader for her Modesty, and other good Qualities; but as it is certain, that Mr. *F.* is utterly unable (as

> we see in all his Pieces, but most flagrantly in this) to draw a Woman of true Virtue and Modesty; so in nothing is she so illustrious as in her Partiality to the well-known Debaucheries of *Jones*, and in her Elopement from her Father's House. (Critical Heritage 192)

From the moment Tom Jones was published, Sophy Western's character has been hotly attacked and as warmly defended. She has been seen as an insipid, flighty girl with no respect for propriety; she has been seen as a most Christian and prudent woman. For me, the dilemma concerning the true nature of Sophia's character is briefly expressed in Fielding's first description of her: Sophy Western can be regarded as a goddess, a merely banal figure ironically praised for charms which are most conventional, or as an important character in her own right. My aim is to explore Sophia Western in her three roles of comic character, moral being accorded free will, and finally, the embodiment of wisdom and maturity, in order to show how vital she is to Tom Jones, and how sincerely complimentary Fielding can be in his representation of a virtuous and admirable woman. By attempting to do so, I follow the words of the narrator, who declares:

> [A]s there are no Perfections of the Mind which do not discover themselves, in that perfect Intimacy, to which we intend to introduce our Reader, with this charming young Creature; so it is needless to mention them here. Nay, it is a Kind of tacit Affront

> to our Reader's Understanding, and may also rob him of that Pleasure which he will receive in forming his own Judgment of her Character. (Tom Jones 157)

The pleasure of coming to an understanding of Sophia's character can only be had if one considers the many facets of her role in Tom Jones.

* * *

Before examining the character of Sophia Western directly, I believe it is necessary to look at the nature of comedy to determine how the demands of this genre shape Fielding's portrayal of his heroine. One of the most important aspects of comedy is that it necessarily emphasizes action or dialogue--which, in Tom Jones, includes the narrator's perpetual conversation with the reader--over the individual psychological experience of the characters concerned. In effect, comedy is a display that an audience can laugh at and understand without fear of becoming excessively emotionally involved with the players. As Robert Alter puts it in his book Fielding and the Nature of the Novel, Fielding

> is plainly a novelist wholly committed to perspicuity and not permeability, in the creation of character, and it is well to keep in mind from the outset that the refusal to render inner states is a conscious decision on his part, made from the awareness that entering into his personages would preclude precisely the

> kind of knowledge of character in which he is interested.(63)

Fielding's elaborate writing style is perfectly suited to the intellectual appeal of comedy, in that it maintains a certain distance of the reader from the characters of Tom Jones: the reader is always interested in the characters, always cares for them, but rarely feels overwhelmed by their thoughts and emotions. Fielding accomplishes this sense of distance by encouraging the reader to feel as if he were watching and judging a spectacle, rather than living vicariously through the characters. He carefully preserves the reader from the full depth or import of his characters', including Sophia's, motives and emotions, in order to leave the reader free to come to a rational assessment of the events and deeds of each character's life.

Fielding manages to maintain the *Verfremdungseffekt*, or alienation of the audience,--"alienation" in the sense that the audience is pointedly made aware that what it is witnessing is fiction, thereby destroying the illusion of being submerged in the characters' experiences--primarily through the intervention of his narrator. For example, the narrator constantly addresses his audience as "reader" or "critic" or "friend"--a very warm, communal, and comic habit of greeting, but one

which brings the reader back to reality nevertheless. Also, the opening chapter of each of the books of Tom Jones, devoted to the musings of Henry Fielding as narrator, is designed not only to instruct readers in the proper interpretation of the chapters to follow, but to remind them that they are merely observers and interpreters of the action, rather than participants. Even in the chapters dealing with the main action of the novel, the narrator reminds us over and over again that there is a wall between "actor" and "viewer," by calling on us for our reactions to the material being presented, or by anticipating our judgements. To the degree that readers engage and interact with the narrator, they naturally lose contact with the other characters of the novel, and lose some of their sympathy for them. In addition, the fact that Fielding has "taken every Occasion of interspersing through the whole sundry Similes, Descriptions, and other kind of poetical Embellishments" (Tom Jones 152) means that the reader gets distracted from the issues at hand by all sorts of amusing, classical, and otherwise parenthetical material. Such distancing devices assure that the reader is kept in the proper, comic frame of mind while he reads Tom Jones. Unfortunately, if taken as a sign of Fielding's levity

towards morality and life, the comic devices employed through the narrator may also detract from the serious attention which the message and virtuous characters of Tom Jones really deserve. In a letter to Samuel Richardson, Astraea and Minerva Hill complain:

> [Fielding] introduces all his Sections, (and too often interweaves the *serious* Body of his meanings) with long Runs of bantering Levity, which his good sense may suffer the Effect of. It is true, he seems to wear this Lightness, as a grave Head sometimes wears a *Feather;* which tho' He and Fashion may consider an ornament, Reflection will condemn, as a Disguise, and *covering*. (Critical Heritage 172)

The point behind an intelligent comedy, of course, is precisely to embed deeper meaning within delightful scenes; however, Fielding's light-hearted and conversational narrator still comes under attack today for disguising or undermining serious meaning in Tom Jones.

Another important issue is the portrayal of character in comedy, and how deep meaning can be imbedded within a single character without jeopardizing the comic intent of the novel as a whole. So often in comedy the reader expects to encounter only stereotypical figures. As Henry Knight Miller says in his book Henry Fielding's Tom Jones and the Romance Tradition, "character [in comedy] tends to be conceived in terms of and expressed in the

language of social roles"(63). Stereotypical characters abound in Tom Jones, where one sees a hypocritical clergyman, a boorish country squire, a "politic" lady of the world, an unfortunate little schoolmaster with a Xanthippe for a wife, a Machiavellian rival, several lecherous ladies, ignorant innkeepers, gossiping women, and many other humorous and recognizable figures. These "typical" characters enliven the action of the novel and make it easily comprehensible to the reader. As a dramatist, particularly a dramatist who admired and imitated Restoration drama, Fielding knew the comic value of such simple representations, and employed them often.

Considered purely in terms of her role as a comic character within a comic plot,--or, rather, according to the "language of social roles"--Sophia may also seem stereotypical: she is the dutiful daughter; she is the young lady in love to distraction. The mixture of these two roles gives her situation some measure of complexity, but does not, by any means, hint that her character has been cast in a different mould from that of the standard female figure in fiction. If one were to regard Tom Jones simply as the continuation of Fielding's dramatic career, Sophia could aptly be styled the *ingénue* of this little drama: a

virtuous and beautiful young lady from the country, chaste, charming, and free from the vices of the fashionable world. What follows is a brief summary of her dramatic role in the action of the novel: Sophia is an obedient, charitable, and inexperienced young woman, who comes to adore a lovable rogue named Tom. She is forbidden to marry Tom by her self-interested, grasping father, who would marry her instead to a fortune in the person of the odious Blifil. In reaction to her father's tyranny, and against the "moral" objections of the world, she escapes to run after her exiled lover. On the road, she encounters her cousin, also a runaway, and learns from her the cost of loving imprudently and disobliging custom. She reaches London. After several adventures, including a timely rescue from an over-ardent suitor, Sophia is put in the position to choose to marry Tom if she will. As the hero has finally proven himself worthy of her, and (more important, in the eyes of the world) his fortune has been established so that no parental objections may bar their union, they are married, restored to the harmony of the countryside, and they live happily ever after. What is this but the standard comic plot of Restoration theatre, pitting the idealism of the younger generation against the materialism of the older, and a

loving and virtuous couple against the fashionable, but corrupt, sentiments of the world? And what is Sophia but a stereotypical portrait of the innocent, yet intelligent and lively, girl whose goodness reforms her lover after his various sexual escapades? If the reader were to trace Fielding's depiction of Sophia back to an earlier tradition, he would have only to think of the typical role of the female in almost any adventure or romance. Sophia, regarded in this light, is nothing more than the princess of a fairy-tale: she is beautiful, good, faces several trials caused by the barbarity or duplicity of those around her, and she emerges as the happiest of brides. Doesn't every comedy or fairy-tale worth its weight end with a wedding? Is not Sophia simply a typical comic heroine?

* * *

However, Sophy Western is of more interest and value than her part in the action of Tom Jones suggests. In fact, I would argue that she is the most important character, and primary source of moral direction, in the novel. Though her role *does* encompass most aspects of the *ingénue* or "good girl", it would be reductive to absurdity to claim that Fielding had left her character so absolutely barren of individual purpose, or so static and one-

dimensional. It would also be ridiculous to declare that his view of the comic was so shallow and formulaic as to preclude the portrayal of a thinking, living heroine. Even as a child, Fielding makes it clear, Sophia is wise beyond her years and able to see through the pretences of society. When Blifil "accidentally" frees Sophy's little bird Tommy, and the foolish bird flies away--of course, a precursor of things to come with the bird's namesake--Sophia instantly realizes what has happened, and discerns what her father, and adult society as a whole, cannot: "that *Tom*, though an idle, thoughtless, rattling Rascal, was no-body's Enemy but his own; and that Master *Blifil*, though a prudent, discreet, sober young Gentleman, was at the same Time stongly attached to the Interest only of one single Person"(Tom Jones 165) and was a nasty stinker besides. She has the good sense to recognize true value, and to despise and reject all that is ugly and selfish and hypocritical. From this early instance of her perspicaciousness, and from her discretion when she begins to discover her own love for Tom, and his for her, the reader can see that Sophia is more than the desirable beloved, a prize for her future husband. She is not simply manipulated by her situation and by other characters ... she acts and reacts according to her own moral consciousness.

The idea of her character as a stereotype relies on the bare bones of the plot of Tom Jones. If the role of stereotypical virtuous female--with all its maidenly faintings, exclamations, blushes, and starts--is the skeleton of Sophia, Fielding effectively fleshes her out when he creates in her a female character of real worth, real decision, and real moral capacity. Miller puts it this way:

> If comedy cannot deal obsessively with "development" or with the so-called "inner life" ... without ceasing to be comedy, and myth or romance cannot descend to psychologizing without ceasing to be mythical, yet as literary forms they can quite obviously provide an illumination of human experience and human character that is as "serious" and profound as that of any literary form known to the world of art.(62)

Sophia's value in the novel does not rely on the accurate presentation of her psychology as a young woman trapped in a delicate situation; this would move her into the realm of tragedy. As a comic character, her "inner life" is limited. But this does not mean that she is a thoughtless and unreflective character. On the contrary, Fielding is careful to imply what her thoughts, feelings and motives are on every occasion, and how these impel her to act; simply because Fielding does not state Sophia's sentiments

explicitly does not mean that he expects she has none. In fact, her actions and decisions clearly show how significant a moral being she is: in Tom Jones, the reader finds that the *ingénue* has been replaced by a woman who must consciously choose to be as virtuous, as estimable, and as lovely, in her actions as she is in her person.

In short, my argument here is very close to that of Angela Smallwood, who, in her book Fielding and the Woman Question, claims that Henry Fielding concerns himself with the "expansion and revaluation of traits of the conventional female character,"(Smallwood 127) in order to make the heroines of his later novels more attractive and substantial figures.[1] Of his most famous novel she says this,

> In *Tom Jones* ... Fielding makes excellence of understanding, an independent moral sense, and spiritual integrity entirely compatible with his ideal of the female character. But this is a somewhat unconventional move, entirely in sympathy with the aspirations of the rational-feminist followers of Mary Astell. As such, it conflicts profoundly with the conventions of a society in which women were required to defer automatically to the authority of men, to fathers and then to husbands. (139-40)

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[1]Throughout this chapter, I am obliged to Angela Smallwood for her re-evaluation of Fielding's view on "the woman question." Her argument, that Fielding takes a much more complex and liberated view of female behaviour and morality than he has usually been given credit for, closely parallels my own.

By "expanding and revaluating" the roles of women, Smallwood believes Fielding aligns himself with the rational-feminists, a group of women who argued--politely and persuasively, through their writings--that women possessed the same moral and intellectual capacities as men, and therefore deserved to be treated as equals. She highlights how truly unconventional it was for an eighteenth-century male author to support a woman's right--even a fictitious woman's right--to make her own decisions and to be a formidable person. Fielding does not seem to perceive, as many of his contemporaries did, an impediment to salvation or morality in the idea of a woman discerning between good and evil, or virtue and patriarchal convention. The character of Sophia Western reflects this unconventional morality. Because of his favourable and relatively liberated depiction of his female protagonists in Tom Jones and Amelia, I also believe that Fielding seeks to redefine convention and the conventional judgement of feminine behaviour. As do the rational feminists, Fielding reflects upon the strictures placed upon women's thoughts and deeds, and models his heroines after his own Christian beliefs and convictions rather than the strict code of convention. However, it is important to note that female obedience and

submission are never rejected by him as ideals (as, indeed, they are not rejected by the rational feminists, who, by and large, were of decidedly conservative leanings). Fielding was no feminist, as we understand the word today: he upheld the necessity for the stratification of society, and supported the differentiation between the roles of the sexes, seeing in this order a reflection of Biblical law. He questioned his society's particular division of the roles of men and women because he believed that most of society's strictures and conventions not only did not promote virtue or reflect what he believed to be the graciousness of Christianity, but also actually fostered vice. To reform society according to his ideals of Christianity, to reduce the unthinking hypocrisy that often hides under the guise of convention, and to promote the proper relationship between the sexes are, I believe, Henry Fielding's goals as a moralist.

Sophia Western is part of Fielding's attempt to promote such a reformation of social affairs. As Fielding states in his Dedication to Tom Jones,

> an Example is a Kind of Picture, in which Virtue becomes as it were an Object of Sight, and strikes us with an Idea of that Loveliness which *Plato* asserts there is in her naked Charms.
>
> Besides displaying that Beauty of Virtue which may attract the Admiration of Mankind,

> I have attempted to engage a stronger Motive to Human Action in her Favour, by convincing Men, that their true Interest directs them to a Pursuit of her. (7)

Fielding does not seek to force his society into being virtuous; he realizes that the persuasive power of an attractive character, combined with a healthy measure of the reader's self-interest, will prove far more effective in promoting the love of virtue and morality than any sermon ever preached. Therefore, Fielding attempts to, as it were, lay naked Sophy's charms for the benefit of the reader: specifically, he discovers all of her perfections so that the reader may learn to discriminate between morality and convention. He presents Sophy as a thoughtful, intelligent woman, thoroughly aware of the duties required of her as a Christian. She is also a sojourner through life, responding to the impulses of her heart. It says much for Fielding's comic vision, as well as his respect for women, that the model of virtue in Tom Jones is not personified, as Smallwood suggests the "good girl" generally is, as an "austere prude, [or] emblem of institutionalized morality" (127), warding off all appearance of impropriety with a disdainful look, but as a woman capable of living freely and joyously within the confines of her own moral laws. In effect, Fielding recreates the ideal of womankind, and he

finds this new kind of woman very good. He has only to convince the rest of society that he is right.

Henry Fielding faced the difficult task of presenting an essentially unconventional heroine for the approval of an audience far too used to an institutionalized double standard, and which accepted that women should neither think for nor govern themselves. To win approval for his female protagonist, and for what he felt were her virtues as a truly moral and upright being, he had to try to create in Sophia a character who conformed sufficiently to the code of convention to strike the audience as a worthy person, while challenging the existing assumptions behind the code. Sophia defies and/or obeys certain conventional ideals of the eighteenth-century--such as beauty, obedience to one's parents, deference to men, innocence, and modesty--in order that the reader may learn to distinguish between what is generally considered proper and fit in a woman, and what is truly virtuous. I would like now to examine how, and to what extent, Fielding qualifies the conventional ideal of womankind.

Even on the simplest and seemingly most superficial of levels, Fielding seeks to expand and revalue Sophia's importance as a female character. Sophy Western is

beautiful--a beneficial, if not morally essential, quality, which we would expect to find in the heroine of a novel. The description of her person is thorough, and overwhelmingly conventional. Expressions such as "Her Complexion had rather more of the Lilly than of the Rose," (Tom Jones 157) and the suggestion of superior beauty to the Venus de Medici are indeed most hackneyed. It might be easy to believe, if the reader accepted that no serious message was to be conveyed through the heroine of Tom Jones, that Fielding had made Sophia entirely conventional when he made her beautiful: physiognomy was nothing new in the eighteenth century, and it is natural that a good girl like Sophy should be pretty, and that her prettiness should reflect exactly how good she is. But, Fielding emphasizes that her mind is of far more importance, and far more worthy of admiration, than her body:

> nor was [her] beautiful Frame disgraced by an Inhabitant unworthy of it. Her Mind was every way equal to her Person; nay the latter borrowed some Charms from the former: For when she smiled, the Sweetness of her Temper diffused that Glory over her Countenance, which no Regularity of Features can give. (Tom Jones 157)

The culmination of Fielding's famous description of Sophia is praise for her mind, the beauty of which he does not attempt to describe in a single passage, but leaves the

reader to discover through observing her life. In the main action of the novel, it is notable that Sophia's beauty is much admired by the people she encounters, but that, as Fielding says, her powers of attraction (even sexual attraction) are founded ultimately upon her mind and personality. Tom supports this view of her when he declares to Partridge: "She is all over, both in Mind and Body, consummate Perfection. She is the most beautiful Creature in the Universe; and yet she is Mistress of such noble, elevated Qualities, that though she is never from my Thoughts, I scarce ever think of her Beauty, but when I see it"(818). If her nigh-perfect appearance is meant to reflect the state of her soul--in that her heart is "as good and innocent, as her Face [is] beautiful"(542)--yet, that appearance is but a pale reflection, for her mind and moral qualities always outshine her physical attributes. Sophia is unconventional because her thoughts and feelings illuminate her appearance: she is more soul than body. Her beauty is important not because it increases her marriageability, sets off to advantage the current fashions, hides her native silliness, or creates opportunities for flirtation--attributes which Fielding finds all too likely to apply to the flighty minds of the majority of young

lasses--but because it manifests the intelligence and purity that are so essential to her character, and which form the basis of her attractiveness to the reader and to Tom Jones.

Another important part of Sophia's attractiveness is modesty. For the conventional woman, Fielding implies, modesty is like beauty ... mostly an ornamental feature. However, there is one difference between beauty and modesty: a woman's physical appearance remains intact for quite some time, while her modesty is typically displayed before the world during certain times and occasions and it disappears once the season of courting ends--rather like a wreath is taken down from a door immediately after Christmas. The conventional expectations of a modest young woman of the eighteenth century were that she be quiet and retiring, and maintain a scrupulous chastity. She was also supposed to be embarrassed by her sexuality, and to deny any natural attraction to a lover in order to secure a place for herself in the world. As an unmarried, then married, woman, she was *to appear* to live the life of a saint, though her thoughts and secret habits could diverge widely from that nun-like ideal. Fielding recognized that a facade of modesty was being used by the members of his society to dupe each other: modesty had become a superficial charm, a controlled

mechanism, and a source of power for unscrupulous mothers and their daughters. A course of honest emotion was a path of folly in the eyes of the world and its representatives, for example, Mistress Western:

> No, no *Sophy*, ... as I am convinced you have a violent Passion, which you can never satisfy with Honour, I will do all I can to put your Honour out of the Care of your Family: For when you are married those Matters will belong only to the Consideration of your Husband. I hope, Child, you will always have Prudence enough to act as becomes you; but if you should not, Marriage hath saved many a Woman from Ruin. (290)

If, indeed, women were only to consider "Matrimony, as Men do Offices of public Trust, only as the Means of making their Fortunes, and of advancing themselves in the World"(316), then they need not bother to pretend to modesty and virtue after their goals have been attained. They need not fret about unsatisfied longings, because they will be secure enough to pursue their whims. They also need not worry about their reputations, for their husbands will at least provide a buffer against public censure. In other words, the world insists that modesty is a social nothing, a thing which presumably does not exist, except as part of the marriage game. If a woman has influence enough, is rich enough, and has nerve enough, she is "free" to be a "Demirep; that is to say, a Woman who intrigues with every

Man she likes, under the Name and Appearance of Virtue; and who, though some over-nice Ladies will not be seen with her, is visited (as they term it) by the whole Town; in short, whom every Body knows to be what no Body calls her"(817). Such is the modesty expected of women by the world.

In the face of what he saw as widespread and institutionalized female hypocrisy, Fielding allows the narrator of Tom Jones to make sweeping statements concerning womankind:

> tho' there is not, perhaps one [woman] in ten thousand who is capable of making a good Actress; and even among these we rarely see two who are equally able to personate the same Character; yet this of Virtue they can all admirably well put on; and as well those Individuals who have it not, as those who possess it, can all act it to the utmost Degree of Perfection. (532)

Fielding does voice such standard, scathing, Restoration-style censure of women, but I believe that he uses such periodic attacks on woman for shock value and satirical effect rather than as a wholesale indictment of the fair sex. For, if Fielding sees that most of womankind--and, indeed, mankind (usually to a greater extent)--is flawed, he is capable of recognizing the value of a non-conformist, reflective woman. It is the conformist woman, the woman who merely pretends for her own purposes to be modest, dutiful,

and pure, that Fielding truly criticizes, for such a person regards only the form and appearance of virtue, rather than the essence of moral behaviour; she is an actress of the most pernicious kind, and an insidious source of private and public ill. Sophia is cleared of all such charges of artifice and affectation when her aunt's assessment of the impropriety of love, and of the cunning of all young women, is refuted; Fielding tells us of Mrs. Western, "as to the plain simple Working of honest Nature, as she had never seen any such, she could know but little of them"(274). Sophy is as simple and honest as she appears, which, to Fielding and his society, was a very rare and unconventional thing, indeed. Her modesty suffuses her character: she is polite, quiet, and unwilling to pollute her ears and mind with filth of any kind; she refuses to condone libertinism or any other immoral proclivity; she keeps a careful guard over her own person and reputation. Fielding calls attention to Sophy's humiliation after her tumble into the arms of a landlord: "Accidents of this Kind we have never regarded in a comical Light; nor will we scruple to say, that he must have a very inadequate Idea of the Modesty of a beautiful young Woman, who would wish to sacrifice it to so paultry a Satisfaction as can arise from Laughter"(574). Modesty is not to be

taken lightly, and it certainly is not to be defined by the values of the world.

Fielding further transforms the idea of modesty and virtue when he declares that they are entirely unrelated to prudery and the sacrifice of simple enjoyment and pleasure. Sophia's modesty is uninjured by her dawning awareness of love for the bastard Tom Jones. Sexual awareness is simply honest, and sexual attraction between two well-suited persons, natural. Fielding calls upon the reader to find it morally acceptable for people to express their love without hiding behind masks (as the dishonest, but socially correct, Lady Bellaston does) or without playing potentially harmful games. In a way, Fielding subverts the sexual standards of his time by developing a more open, less regulated, view of romantic love, and making such a view compatible with female modesty:

> He then snatched her Hand and eagerly kissed it, which was the first Time his Lips had ever touched her. The Blood, which before had forsaken her Cheeks, now made her sufficient Amends, by rushing all over her Face and Neck with such Violence, that they became all of a scarlet Colour. She now first felt a Sensation to which she had been before a Stranger, and which, when she had Leisure to reflect on it, began to acquaint her with some Secrets...(168)

As one would expect from a demure maiden, Sophia blushes at the thought of being in love, and being the object of a

tender affection. But, notably, Sophia is unashamed by the new sensation of physical pleasure derived from a lover's touch. She does not scold Tom for his importunity, does not turn from him in a silent show of outrage or fear for her reputation, does not entreat him to leave her at once ... she does nothing but behave civilly and kindly to him. An even more revealing instance of Sophia's defiance of the socially-imposed conditions of modesty occurs after she comes across Tom fighting with Blifil and Thwackum: she faints, and Jones rushes her to a stream to sprinkle her with water and restore her to consciousness.

> *Jones*, who had hitherto held this lovely Burthen in his Arms, now relinquished his Hold; but gave her at the same Instant a tender Caress, which, had her Senses been then perfectly restored, could not have escaped her Observation. As she expressed, therefore, no Displeasure at this freedom, we suppose she was not sufficiently recovered from her Swoon at the Time. (264-65)

The implication, of course, is that Sophia is completely aware of what is going on. She expresses no displeasure at Tom's caress, because she feels none. Horrible! Monstrous! To allow a man such liberties was shocking! But, to Fielding, the "much-vaunted [dictates of] female modesty often [boiled] down to coy or cruel deceit," which was "at best irritatingly misguided and at worst

destructive"(Smallwood 129). Unlike fashionable society, Fielding is not "obsessed with suppressing, restraining and disguising quite natural and often valuable feelings. He mocks the convention by which the woman of fashion displays her modesty and virtue by disguising her true feelings or denying her desired suitor"(129). Honesty is the deepest concern for a truly modest girl, and does more for her self-preservation than could any act of reserve, coyness or disdain ... which is why Fielding feels it unnecessary for Sophia to be treated as a passive, asexual being, or a "legless angel," (Orwell 503) in order to be virtuous. Such a representation of a female modesty is refreshingly liberated for an author of Fielding's time.

Naturally, Fielding expected an adverse reaction from the members of his society concerning his revision of the ideal of womankind: he realized that some people would be horrified at the thought of female sexual awareness, and that most people would accept that, by falling in love with a social nonentity, Sophia committed a kind of sin. In effect, Fielding's critics believed that Sophy's sexual honesty was a sign of forwardness, which compromised her claims to respectability, and offended every rule of social convention. To deal with his opponents' censure of his

female protagonist, Fielding anticipates and recognizes their objections to her unconventional behaviour, and then vindicates her choices through a subtle rhetorical strategy. For example, as Sophia ponders her growing love for Tom, the narrator comments,

> for sure the most outragiously rigid among [Sophia's] sex will excuse her for pitying a Man, whom she saw miserable on her own Account; nor can they blame her for esteeming one who visibly from the most honourable Motives, endeavoured to smother a Flame in his own Bosom, which ... was preying upon, and consuming his very Vitals. (Tom Jones 237)

What reader would be happy to claim the title "outragiously rigid" by insisting that Sophia transgresses against the laws of morality by esteeming Mr. Jones? Who would wish to aver that Sophia is misguided in her choice of a lover when Fielding defends Jones so ably in this passage? By making appeals to the open-mindedness and rationality of his readers, Fielding is able to meet the doubts and questions of his audience, and effectively negotiate peace: the reputation of his heroine is preserved, and the reader may be persuaded to adopt a more enlightened attitude towards a new image of female perfection.

When it comes to the contentious issue of female obedience, Fielding's technique of "guiding" the reader

becomes even more important, for Sophia's (dis)obedience to her father is the greatest source of dispute for those who question her role in Tom Jones. The big dilemma for readers of Fielding's time was to determine if Sophy behaved properly in running away from home or if she simply defied all common decency in order to have her own way. Fielding engages this question, and the offshoot matters of freedom and equality of the sexes, carefully and conservatively. Because today's anti-patriarchal feminism would have been seen by him as a type of anarchy, and its challenging of the basic tenets of Christian belief and practice as apostasy, Fielding does not directly engage with the issues important to "radical" feminists: issues which in his time simply did not exist. Instead, his concern is that of the rational feminists: to direct his readers to a more just and clear-sighted view of morality, especially where it concerns the notion of female obedience and submission. Fielding attempts to show the relevance of Sophia's perceptions and the propriety of her decisions, while recognizing the fears and (in his eyes) mistaken beliefs of his opponents. When Sophia makes the "strange Resolution"(348) to run away from her father's house, and when she actually goes through with her plans, Fielding makes it clear that he expects her

choice to be greeted with public outrage: "many Readers, who have, I make no Doubt, been long since well convinced of the Purpose of our Heroine, ... have heartily condemned her for it as a wanton Baggage"(564). "But" Angela Smallwood notes, "Fielding's pretence of giving weight to these particular views by giving space to them acts only to propel the reader into sympathy with Sophia's unconformity"(147). The singularity of Sophia's integrity, and her "strange" determination to follow the dictates of her own heart and conscience are emphasized by Fielding to move the reader to a new awareness of moral behaviour.

The critic *Orbilius* called Sophia a hypocrite, preserving only the appearance of innocence and modesty and duty, while really subverting male parental authority: "Who ever suspected her Disobedience, when her Inclination was complied with?" he demands (An Examen of the History of Tom Jones; Critical Heritage 210). Fielding clears her from any such charge, by confirming how genuine her obedience is.

> She was really what [her father] frequently called her, his little Darling; and she well deserved to be so: For she returned all his Affection in the most ample Manner. She had preserved the most inviolable Duty to him in all Things; and this her Love made not only easy, but so delightful, that when one of her Companions laughed at her for placing so much Merit in such scrupulous Obedience, as that young Lady called it, *Sophia* answered, `You mistake me, Madam, if

> you think I value myself upon this Account: For besides that I am barely discharging my Duty, I am likewise pleasing myself. I can truly say, I have no Delight equal to that of contributing to my Father's Happiness; and if I value myself ... it is on having this Power and not on executing it.' (TJ 191)

By using the phrase "scrupulous Obedience," Sophia's friend tries to label Sophia's religious sense of duty to her father, and sincere and saintly love for him, as enthusiasm, or a manipulative and extravagant show. But Sophy's modest disclaimer prevents the reader from believing any such suggestion. It is Sophy's friend, mocking duty and respect for one's parents, who is truly the morally-suspect figure here, in spite, or perhaps because, of her conventionality: this friend behaves exactly as Orbilius would have her, publicly adhering to all that is respectable, yet she is a hypocrite because the essence of moral behaviour is lost on her. Sophia effectively defies conventional expectation by actually embodying Christian love, duty, and respect. She is thus able to encompass the daily chores of life into a grand scheme of harmony and order, and achieve a sense of peace and joyful serenity unknown to most. Furthermore, because Sophia's duty towards her father is based on genuine Christianity, Fielding proclaims her at liberty to disregard laws that she knows have no basis in truth, love or charity;

in other words, she is bound by moral law rather than the expectations of the world, or even the unreasonable demands of her father, and she is free to be obedient to her own beliefs, rather than subject to the will of others. Perhaps this is what Orbilius feared and hated: the thought that a woman could represent honesty, recognize her role within the world, yet be free from the arbitrary laws imposed by society.

If obedience to her father is one of the major concerns of Sophia's life, it is yet second to her duty to herself and to her sense of religion. While Sophia submits to play the rollicking songs the Squire prefers, rather than her own beloved Handel, she will not play the harlot to his greed and ambition in the name of obedience. She is tempted to martyr herself by agreeing to marry Blifil, but awakes to the realization that this would be madness:

> The Idea ... of the immense Happiness she should convey to her Father by her Consent to this Match, made a strong Impression on her Mind. Again, the extreme Piety of such an Act of Obedience, worked very forcibly, as she had a very deep Sense of Religion. Lastly, when she reflected how much she herself was to suffer, being indeed to become little less than a Sacrifice, or a Martyr, to filial Love and Duty, she felt an agreeable Tickling in a certain little Passion, which tho' it bears no immediate Affinity either to Religion or Virtue, is often so kind as to lend great Assistance in executing the Purposes of both.

> *Sophia* was charmed with the Contemplation of so heroic an Action, and began to compliment herself with such premature Flattery, when *Cupid* ... suddenly crept out, and ... kicked all out before him. (360)

A false sense of religion backed by "filial Love, Piety and Pride"(361) would motivate Sophia to prostitute herself, but hope for the future and love for a man who does not demand virgin sacrifice to Mammon restore her to the true path of virtue and religious duty. As a consequence of her renewed certainty of what is right, Sophia states her objection to the proposed match with Blifil in no uncertain terms. She also makes clear her expectations of her father. Perhaps the most articulate expression of her moral stance occurs in Book Eighteen, when Sophia explains herself to Mr. Allworthy:

> [W]hatever his [Squire Western's] Apprehensions or Fears have been, if I know my Heart, I have given no Occasion for them; since it hath always been a fixed Principle with me, never to have marry'd without his Consent. This is, I think, the Duty of a Child to a Parent; and this, I hope, nothing could ever have prevailed with me to swerve from. I do not indeed conceive, that the Authority of any Parent can oblige us to marry, in direct Opposition to our Inclinations. To avoid a Force of this Kind, which I had Reason to suspect, I left my Father's House, and sought Protection elsewhere. This is the Truth of my Story; and if the World, or my Father, carry my Intentions any farther, my own Conscience will acquit me. (955)

With this firm protestation of her own integrity, Sophia effectively refutes all claims that she is a hussy who defied the authority of her father to run after a pretty fellow. By running away, she states explicitly, she did nothing more than protect her right to have a say in her future happiness or misery. Rather than sneaking behind her father's back and eloping, as Harriet Nightingale does, Sophia asserts her right to choose a mate, yet, at the same time, acknowledges her place within the social system in which she lives. That she dares speak up for herself at all is amazing.

While Sophia is able to balance her responsibility to herself with the respect due to her father, it is difficult for her to reconcile her own perceptions of morality with the ideas of the world around her. To the admonitions of her aunt to accept Lord Fellamar and have some regard for worldly prestige, she replies,

> Surely, ... I am born deficient, and have not the Senses with which other People are blessed: There must be certainly some Sense which can relish the Delights of Sound and Show, which I have not: For surely mankind would not labour so much, nor sacrifice so much for the obtaining; nor would they be so elate and proud with possessing what appeared to them, as it doth to me, the most insignificant of all Trifles. (889)

Through her straightforward yet somewhat bewildered expression of her "deficiency," Sophy actually describes her quiet, unassuming integrity. Sophia's natural impulses and her utter lack of need for self-aggrandizement allow her to renounce the dictates and offerings of the world, and to exercise her liberty of deciding as she sees fit. That her thoughts are just and sagacious beyond her years supports my belief that Sophia Western is the main source of moral direction in Tom Jones, and, as her name suggests, the embodiment of wisdom: she alone cannot be duped by the appearances, pretences and excuses of others, and her innocence will not be compromised by the wishes of those who insist they have power over her. Temptations of a worldly nature do not exist in her and make no sense to her. Sophia's innate moral understanding and discretion are thus acknowledged by Fielding--through his depiction of the reactions of various characters to Sophia's revolutionary (and truly moral) behaviour--to be in conflict with the values of the world. The ideal woman is not in the least conformist.

In his revaluation of Sophy's beauty, modesty, obedience, and many other worthy traits, Fielding attempts to portray her as a new ideal of womanhood. This ideal

woman is honestly religious, modest, and worthy of praise, although she does not necessarily abide by the rules of her society. Above all else, she is a moral being capable of assessing the world, and of deciding on a course of action which best preserves, and even enhances, her virtue. She is an individual, ultimately responsible only to herself and God, though still bound to the community in which she lives.

Fielding's presentation of his heroine is, however, not entirely liberated: while I think it is indisputable that Fielding grants the female protagonist of Tom Jones a latitude largely unthinkable to most of his society, and defends her self-sufficiency from charges of impropriety, he is by no means free from all "the basic assumptions governing relations between the sexes," assumptions which stressed "that men and women were naturally different in capacity, and so ought to play distinct social roles" (Porter 23). If, as I argue, Fielding concedes a woman's right to form her own opinions and to resist the control or domination of those influenced by immoral or amoral values, he does not approve of a woman loosed from the strictures of an ordered society. His support for what he perceived as an ordered existence does not deny women the right to be considered and respected as

moral beings, but many readers, including myself, certainly have a problem with some aspects of his characterization of women. Perhaps the most troublesome and contentious passage in Tom Jones is Allworthy's, when he assesses Sophia's character for her father's benefit, and thereby establishes a model for all virtuous women to emulate:

> she hath one Quality ... which as it is not of a glaring Kind, more commonly escapes Observation; so little indeed is it remarked, that I want a Word to express it. ... I never heard any thing of Pertness, or what is called Repartee out of her Mouth; no Pretence to Wit, much less to that Kind of Wisdom, which is the Result only of great Learning and Experience; the Affectation of which, in a young Woman, is as absurd as any of the Affectations of an Ape. No dictatorial Sentiments, no judicial Opinions, no profound Criticisms. Whenever I have seen her in the Company of Men, she hath been all attention, with the Modesty of a Learner, not the Forwardness of a Teacher. ... Indeed, she always shewed the highest Deference to the Understandings of Men; a Quality absolutely essential to the making a good Wife. I shall only add, that as she is most apparently void of all Affectation, this Deference must be certainly real. (TJ 882-83)

Clearly, Allworthy believes he accords Sophia the highest form of praise in this speech, and he really does set her apart and above all other women. However, the basis for his praise is a little disconcerting, as is the weight his opinion carries: as one of the most important advocates of morality in the novel, and certainly the dominant figure of

male authority, his patriarchal valuation of Sophy's character is often taken as a key to proper female conduct. Is one therefore to conclude that modesty is equivalent to deference to men? That a girl should be backward, unlearned, and submissive? The insulting idea that a learned woman is like an ape, mimicking others without possessing a true understanding, is enough to provoke anyone to accuse Fielding of anti-feminism. However, one must remember that this is Allworthy's speech, not Fielding's. Furthermore, Allworthy makes so many erroneous assumptions about the moral character of those around him that it is difficult for a discerning reader to accept his word as law. This is a very important point, for Allworthy is imposed upon by a great many people; he is far from perfect, and should not be regarded as a perfect judge or arbiter of justice. Keeping Allworthy's fallibility in mind, there is yet no other character in Tom Jones, aside from the narrator, that Fielding would deem morally sound enough to pronounce judgement on Sophia. Therefore, Allworthy's views on female intelligence and deference must be given some consideration, especially when one reflects on Sophia as an idealization of womankind.

The issue of female education cannot be ignored. While Allworthy praises Sophia for her lack of pretence to a knowledge which is beyond her years (and, presumably, beyond the pale of her sex's interest), Fielding frequently mocks poor Aunt Western for her ridiculous use of political rhetoric and lack of real understanding, and Jenny Jones for the uselessness of her education and the danger it exposes her to. As the learned women in his novels are often the targets for a great many digs and jibes, and his characterization of the central female figures in his novels relies upon, and defends, their naturalness and lack of sophistication, one may reasonably conclude that Fielding inherently disapproves of over-educated women. For example, Mistress Western is admitted to be good-natured at bottom, but Fielding also snipes at her for being masculine, overbearing (being financially independent, she can get away with this) and older, so rather unattractive; he even makes her an object of scorn and ridicule, by exposing how easily this politic woman was deceived by Mr. Fitzpatrick in the matter of her niece Harriet. By contrast, Fielding emphasizes Sophia's femininity, her sweet, condescending nature, and her possession of real human understanding. An essential part of her femininity is a lack of affectation of

knowledge; if Sophia is meant to be regarded as intelligent, and her mind as admirable, it is not because she is erudite. It is easy to see that Fielding does not always see beyond the conventional expectations of women, if we consider how he treats the matter of Sophy's education. Possessed of a lovely form, and, more important, a naturally good disposition, Sophia improves upon her nature by carefully determining to behave as a moral being ought, and by cultivating her capacity for compassion and charity. The reader is told: "whatever mental Accomplishments [Sophia] had derived from Nature, they were somewhat improved and cultivated by Art: for she had been educated under the Care of an Aunt, who was a Lady of great Discretion, and was thoroughly acquainted with the World"(158). But, as the reader shortly learns that Mrs. Western has very little discretion, and her acquaintance with the world has led her to distrust all people and to expect sophistry at every turn, and further that Sophia is utterly free from such vices, one must conclude that Sophia has taught herself, and her emphasis has been a moral, rather than a worldly, education. Sophia has indeed been touched very little by art.

Disturbingly, Fielding finds nothing wrong with her lack of an extensive or systematic education. He is content to let Sophy read novels to learn of human nature, to converse with a limited number of people in order to learn to deal with the world, and to count herself too humble to contradict the opinions of others, based on her own lack of education. But he does raise Sophia above the conventional ignorance expected of females, by showing how good her natural intuition is, and how effective her self-directed programme of learning: she carefully judges all behaviour with which she comes in contact and all the people; she displays the utmost taste and discretion in even the smallest choices. For example, when her Aunt questions her about a novel she is reading, Sophia replies, "it is a Book which I am neither ashamed nor afraid to own I have read. It is the production of a young Lady of Fashion, whose good Understanding, I think, doth Honour to her Sex, and whose good Heart is an Honour to Human Nature"(286). According to Fielding, "good Understanding" in a woman is akin to intelligence, and a "good heart" is the most admirable quality she can possess. "Fielding sees no moral benefit to be gained in extending the experience of women to include classical learning of the sort acquired by men

educated at the public schools," for he finds such an education in a female "irrelevant to the individual's Christian progress" (Smallwood 137). Even a further education in or observation of the ways of the world could prove damaging to Sophia's purity.

> By her Conversation and Instructions, *Sophia* was perfectly well-bred, though perhaps she wanted a little of that Ease in her Behaviour, which is to be acquired only by Habit, and living within what is called the polite Circle. But this, to say the Truth, is often too dearly purchased; and though it hath Charms so inexpressible, that the *French*, perhaps, among other Qualities, mean to express this, when they declare they know not what it is, yet its Absence is well compensated by Innocence; nor can good Sense, and a natural Gentility, ever stand in need of it. (TJ 158)

Sophia is, in Fielding's eyes, primarily a moral being, a natural being; a worldly education is not supposed by Fielding to be essential to her growth. She is admirable and unconventional because she has taught herself, has unerringly followed the right path, and has emerged unscathed by the influence of her immoderate father and aunt. Her isolation from the world, and from experience, is seen as a benefit, for it has kept her natural, and free from the morally worthless polish of society. The unconventionality of Sophia's mind and soul rests on her ability to perceive what goes on around her, and to believe

in the justice of her own assessment of the situation. She is certainly more clear-sighted than any other character in the novel, with an intuitive understanding of events and people. In his discussion of suspicion, Fielding comments:

> A second Degree of this Quality seems to arise from the Head. This is indeed no other than the Faculty of seeing what is before your Eyes, and of drawing Conclusions from what you see. The former of these is unavoidable by those who have any Eyes, and the latter is perhaps no less certain and necessary a Consequence of our having any Brains. (TJ 616)

Sophia will not allow herself to be deceived; she trusts her eyes and herself. Once she has assessed a situation, she acts, in accordance with her own moral code. It is important to note that Sophy is free from the viciousness and guilt which often accompany suspicion: "[Sophia] is the only character in the book to combine great moral clarity and consistency and personal integrity with the perceptiveness to make an accurate judgement... . She stands alone, moreover, with no moral guide or mentor" (Smallwood 138-39). Untaught, she is yet intelligent; inexperienced, she is yet wise.

While I cannot support the claim--made by Allworthy, and the negative examples of several "learned" female figures--that a directed and extensive education

could prove harmful to a woman, I do not perceive that Fielding otherwise divorces his central female characters from the realm of rationality. Certainly, he does not portray Sophia as irrational or stupid; in fact, her considerable insight proceeds from a discernment ultimately "aris[ing] from the Head" (TJ 616) though balanced by her heart. Her unconventional decisions and deeds, based on love for Tom and hope for a future with him, are neither unreasonable nor hasty--as women's thoughts are likely to be. In the face of such resolution and discretion, it is easy to see why Sophia has been hailed as a symbol, or even apotheosis, of wisdom, as her name suggests.

* * *

It is nothing new for Wisdom to be portrayed as a female: we are all familiar with Athena and Minerva, Greek and Roman goddesses of wisdom. But, rather than localizing wisdom in a single female form, Fielding stresses Wisdom's power of influence over all humanity, and connects true wisdom with Christianity. The words of Proverbs describing the influence of wisdom reflect much of what passes in Tom Jones:

> When wisdom entereth into thine heart,
> and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul;
> Discretion shall preserve thee,
> understanding shall keep thee:
> To deliver thee from the way of the

> evil *man*, from the man that speaketh
> froward things;
> Who leave the paths of uprightness, to
> walk in the ways of darkness;
> Who rejoice to do evil, *and* delight in
> the frowardness of the wicked;
> Whose ways *are* crooked, and *they* froward
> in their paths:
> To deliver thee from the strange woman,
> *even* from the stranger *which* flattereth with
> her words;
> Which forsaketh the guide of her youth,
> and forgetteth the covenant of her God.
> For her house inclineth unto death, and
> her paths unto the dead. (King James Bible
> *Proverbs* 2: 10-18)

Wisdom has the power to restore a man to prudence and the paths of righteousness, and "paths" are naturally of great importance in a novel of the picaresque tradition, abounding with travel and adventures on the road. Tom manages to choose a great many wrong paths, getting distracted by the lies of men and the lusts of strange women ... it is Sophia, or Wisdom, who saves him from the evil pit into which he had fallen. "Don't believe me upon my Word; I have a better Security, a Pledge for my Constancy, which it is impossible to see and doubt ... There, behold it there, in that lovely Figure, in that Face, that Shape, those Eyes, that Mind which shines through those Eyes: Can the Man who shall be in Possession of these be inconstant? Impossible" (TJ 973). Wisdom is the pilot of a sensible man's life, and undoubtedly, Sophia becomes Tom's guiding principle. When

they marry, Tom gains not only a loving and lovely wife, but is united with his reason (982).

Tom Jones can be seen as a *Bildungsroman*, a novel designed to show the moral development of its central male character, with Sophia as a light to illuminate his way. Unfortunately, in this scenario, though Wisdom has a powerful influence, she is only truly important because of the effect she has on Tom rather than because of any development of her own; she becomes a static representation, rather than a character, and simply a reward for Tom at the end of his journey. With the care that Fielding devotes to describing Sophia's virtues, her dreadful dilemma, the motives behind her resolutions, and the justness of her actions, I cannot believe that she is important only as a source of inspiration to Tom, although this *is* part of her role in the novel. I tend to see Tom Jones as a version of The Pilgrim's Progress, with Tom as Christian, treading the road of life, emerging from the perils of Vanity Fair, and finding salvation at the end of the road. Sophia, I believe, is also a pilgrim, facing trials and hardships--though Fielding's code of female conduct does not allow her to be exposed to the same sort of risks as his hero faces--in her journey towards a heavenly destination. If she

travels a shorter distance, it is because she is more perfect than Tom, and naturally wiser. She has been gifted with, and has cultivated, her ability to choose the right path based on her moral discretion, and her role as Wisdom merely supplements the virtue the reader has already seen to exist in her.

* * *

Sophia is a thinking and determining being, a resolute Christian, and the arbitress of her own fate: she is a moral creature, as well as an exquisite example of beauty and delicacy of soul, mind and body. Moreover, she plays an active and vital role in her own life, and in the lives that touch hers, not simply by adhering to conventional practices and expectations, but by applying her own insights and virtue to the world around her. Far from depicting the heroine of Tom Jones as a rather insignificant, uncomplicated figure, who naturally conforms to the dictates of the patriarchal world in which she lives, content to play a peripheral role in life, Fielding portrays Sophia as a wonderful, glowing woman of spirit and true (therefore, tried) virtue. According to the double standard of his time, Fielding could have been satisfied to say of his female protagonist, "she is lovely, she obeys the rules,

therefore she is good," without any regard for her thoughts or moral development. Rationality and morality were the province of the male of the species, and should have had no part in Sophia's make-up; she should simply have obeyed the rules unquestioningly. Many of Fielding's critics desired this type of clear-cut delineation of femininity, for, presumably, they could not comprehend a larger, more active, role in life for women. Such critics seem to believe as Mrs. Western does, that a girl's only role in life is to marry a fortune, and to aim for a "Coronet on [her] Coach" (TJ 888). By contrast, Fielding allows his heroine moral discernment and competence, if not a full knowledge and experience of the world. He stresses how great her influence is on those around her, and hints at how wonderful a mother she will be. He also moves into the realm of allegory by presenting Sophia as an embodiment of wisdom, and the guiding principle of thinking men. Most important, though, Sophia is presented as a superb model of responsible self-regulation.

In Sophia Western, Henry Fielding created a figure of integrity and decision. She is the most responsible and virtuous character in Tom Jones, Allworthy not excluded, with a complete awareness of her duty to her father and her

duty to herself. Her awareness extends itself into the realm of honest human emotion: she does not hide her feelings--or hide *from* her feelings. Nor does she attempt to insinuate herself into the favour of the world for her own nefarious purposes. Instead, she chooses a less conventional and more honourable path: she acknowledges her emotions and responds to them in a thoroughly logical and admirable way. She is not Orwell's "legless angel" (503), asexual, passive, simply floating over the earth. She is human, and as a human being, has desires, faults (notably vanity), and the ability to act upon her thoughts and wishes. By emphasizing Sophia's humanity and goodness, Henry Fielding seriously intends the reader to see Sophia as the most praiseworthy, and God-like, figure in Tom Jones. Martin Battestin says in The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art, "By the practice of his craft, the novelist [Fielding] aimed not only to delight his reader but to instruct him in the shaping of that greater artifact, the good man"(151). The good woman in Tom Jones fulfils Fielding's aims as a novelist by delighting the reader and by guiding humanity to a better path. Sophia effectively sets an example for a new and, as Fielding saw it, better morality and sense of religion. The serious attention which Sophia's decisions

and actions call for is perfectly attuned to the comic intent of the novel as a whole, because through her the promotion of virtue and innocence is achieved, and the Divine Comedy of salvation is put within the reach of humanity.

BOOTH'S ANGEL

It is obvious that Henry Fielding's last novel, Amelia, is very different from Tom Jones: gone are the mirth and rollicking adventures of a good-hearted rogue, gone the boisterous squires, and gone is the life of the road, with its endless variety of diversions and characters; the merry rebellion of the picaresque form has no place in the close and confined atmosphere of Amelia, where the cast is limited, and all seems filled with foreboding and distress. Gone, too, is the presence of a personable narrator to guide the reader through the course of the entire novel, and to uphold benevolently the idea that man is essentially good and will continue so if educated and encouraged properly. Instead, in Amelia, the relatively undirected reader witnesses what befalls an isolated family in the midst of a moral wasteland, and discovers that the world is a problematical place where peoples' actions, intentions, and interactions with society are often misguided and confused, and in which the innocent

or foolish are helplessly buffeted and tossed. Amid this muddle of despair and despondency is Amelia, the heroine, and in her the reader also faces another source of perplexity: what precisely is the role of the female protagonist in this menacing world? As we shall see, she is a gentle, nurturing mother, a loyal and adoring wife, and a stronghold for virtue against the deceptiveness of the world; however, the reader is left to resolve if, as the moral centre of the novel, Amelia Booth is simply an angel--a being of a different order who, by nature, is free from blemish and, thus, humanity--or a person who consciously commits herself to an unconventional life of servitude and sacrifice.

* * *

Before exploring Amelia Booth's role in greater detail, I feel it is necessary to emphasize how new Amelia was for Fielding: how different in style from his earlier works, and how different in purpose. I have already mentioned that Fielding discarded the picaresque form when he wrote his last novel, and that he drastically reduced the role of his narrator: whereas the narrator in Tom Jones can be considered Fielding's "star" character or even the author's *alter ego*, the narrator in Amelia is reduced to chronicling events in a straightforward manner, and speaks

directly to the reader only in order to vent his anger and frustration, or to justify the regard he has for his two central characters. As George Sherburn remarks in his article "Fielding's *Amelia*: An Interpretation," Fielding "undertook in *Amelia* to write a sober, faithful history of his own times in humble prose"(147). Almost all that makes Fielding's earlier writings comic and celebratory--the light-hearted banter with the reader, an elevated and ironic style, the gentle laughter over people's foibles, the healthy recognition of people's appetites--seems to have been expunged from Amelia. Fielding's work as a magistrate at the time in which he wrote Amelia made him thoroughly aware that the world was steeped in corruption, and his suspicion that most people are degenerate and depraved emerges clearly in the novel. Readers of Fielding's time were shocked by how different Amelia was from his earlier, happier works. In particular, they were astonished to find that one of the most famous (not to say notorious) comic novelists of their age would write something so melancholy and grim for their entertainment. As a result, many critics claimed that Fielding had gone utterly beyond his province as a writer when he attempted this novel. "Poor Fielding, I believe, designed to be good, but did not know how, and in the attempt

lost his genius, low humour," says one Mrs. Donnellan in a letter to Samuel Richardson (Critical Heritage 319). Most people agreed, and the book was generally considered a failure. Fielding's innate good humour seemed to many to have disappeared--along with many of his innovations as a comic writer--in his attempt to present an unquestionably serious moral story to the world. Here was something different, indeed, for his readers!

There are reasons for Fielding's new and heavy-handed emotionalism and didacticism in Amelia, however, which do not agree with common conclusions that he was old and jaded, had lost his genius, and was at odds with the world. Fielding's purpose as a writer has changed in this novel: he is not so much concerned to win his audience to his way of thinking, and certainly not to make his readers laugh themselves out of their vanities, as to force them to recognize the injustices the Booths face as they stumble along in their domestic lives, and to thereby initiate change. Because Fielding had become interested in exploring to a greater extent the psychologies of his characters, and in exhibiting things both outrageous and pathetic as a stimulus to his audience to reform themselves and their society, he realized that he should have to take a new

approach to writing in Amelia: in order to correct society's hypocrisy and injustice, to promote a new social morality, and to reflect his grave and profound concern for the welfare of his fellow man, he would have to write more forthrightly and in a more impassioned style than he had formerly employed. Therefore, in this novel he vigorously upbraids society for its faults, and dwells long on the consequences of widespread injustice and immorality: Amelia Booth's tears, terrors and trials. By taking such an approach to writing, Fielding actually follows the example of most of the female writers of his time, who also dealt in sentimentalism. Unfortunately, due to his lack of experience in this form, or perhaps his inability to operate outside the realm of comic equilibrium, Fielding's writing in Amelia is neither consistent nor very pleasing. The parts of the book that shine are those that are satiric and have a sharp, even bitter, comic edge. The dominating sentimentalism of the novel lacks keenness or grace, and often simply dissolves into melodrama rather than affecting the reader and moving him towards charity. Furthermore, the "comic" conclusion of Amelia, in which Booth almost instantaneously reforms himself by tossing aside his theory of the dominant passion--his belief that whichever passion is uppermost in one's mind will

determine one's behaviour, and is virtually irresistible--and accepting true religion, only to be rewarded with the timely restoration of Amelia's fortune and happiness ever after, rings false and shallow against the desolate world described throughout the novel. Despite Fielding's lack of control over the form he had chosen--Robert Alter appropriately calls Amelia "an only partly realized experiment in a different mode of fiction" (viii)--the reasons behind his decision to adopt the conventions of the sentimental writers reflect his continuing social and moral concern: he hopes to appeal to the hearts, rather than the minds, of his readers in order to move them to an awareness of suffering and virtue, of corruption and vice, and of the need (and rewards) for the Christian government of self and country.

It was highly unusual for a male writer to adopt the "feminine" mode of sentimental writing, and Fielding undoubtedly followed his rival Samuel Richardson into the genre. As Margaret Doody expresses it,

> Most of the English novels of [this] time were written by females, and deal with the question of courtship or seduction from a feminine viewpoint.
>
> Such novels were regarded by the literary ... as sad trash, hack works dealing with trivial subjects. In Richardson's period, there is something unorthodox, almost something essentially `low' in a man's bothering to write a novel about a woman. After all, women had, at

> least in theory, little to do with the real world. Theirs is not the arena in which effective decisions are taken, in which moral choice is important. (15)

Doody is impressed with Richardson for daring to write about women, for choosing the epistolary form so reflective of women's daily writing, and for his interest in romance, a style typically associated with women. In Amelia, she also admits, Fielding (finally) treats female issues such as attempted seduction and courtship "with a seriousness that originally belonged to the female writers of amatory fiction"(24). Unlike Richardson, Fielding did not adopt the epistolary form of novel writing, and he certainly did not go in for the kind of salacious detail to be found in much of the female writers' novels, but it is well known that he had, at least initially, a great admiration for Richardson's novel Clarissa, and he undeniably responded to what he esteemed and disliked in that novel when he wrote Amelia. In keeping with Richardson's example, Fielding titled a novel with a woman's name rather than a man's, and shifted the interest from the dealings of the wide world--man's world--to the more mundane trials of the woman's world, which naturally centred around the home and family; he also attempted to render the highly charged emotions of his heroine during her many periods of

distress. However, recognizing some aspects of Clarissa's character which he considered to be moral flaws, he determined to improve on Clarissa and show the world a truly virtuous heroine. Fielding's desire to be taken as seriously as Richardson, to be recognized as a moral writer with the power to affect his audience rather than a mere writer of "low" comedies, and to produce social change all led him to create a different kind of work of his final novel.

* * *

Considering Fielding's new approach to fiction in his final novel, and his bleaker depiction of human nature and the world in general, one may easily wonder how Amelia Booth functions as the heroine of Amelia. It is difficult to articulate. Unlike Sophia, she is not the goddess of the novel, and is introduced with no great fanfare; furthermore, Amelia's name does not suggest any obvious allegorical significance,[1] for Fielding's new interest in realism, as Alter points out, led him away from assigning names indicative of personal traits or reflective of stations in life to most of the characters in Amelia. Also, a brief

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[1]Amelia's name is presumably based upon the word "ameliorate," which stems from the Latin word "melior," meaning "better". As a classical scholar, Fielding would certainly have known the root of his heroine's name, and recognized its implications. It would certainly make sense to regard Amelia as an "improved" or superior person.

expression of Amelia's role in the novel is never made. The first one hears of her is from Booth, when he recounts his courtship of and subsequent marriage to Amelia to Miss Matthews, a fellow prisoner at Newgate:

> I knew her in the first Dawn of her Beauty; and, I believe, Madam, she has as much as ever fell to the Share of a Woman; but though I always admired her, it was long without any Spark of Love. Perhaps the general Admiration which at that Time pursued her, the Respect paid her by Persons of the highest Rank, and the numberless Addresses which were made her by Men of great Fortune, prevented my aspiring at the Possession of those Charms, which seemed so absolutely out of my Reach. However it was, I assure you, the Accident which deprived her of the Admiration of others, made the first great Impression on my Heart in her Favour. The injury done to her Beauty by the overturning of a Chaise, by which, as you may well remember, her lovely Nose was beat all to pieces, gave me an Assurance that the Woman who had been so much adored for the Charms of her Person, deserved a much higher Adoration to be paid to her Mind: For that she was in the latter Respect infinitely more superior to the rest of her Sex, than she had ever been in the former. (Amelia 66)

In this description, Amelia initially sounds very much like an ordinary woman of the gentry: pretty, marriageable, popular, unexceptional in all respects. However, when an accident robs her of her beauty, and thereby of the favourable perception and fawning approval of fashionable society, one realizes that, if anything, beauty has been an impediment to Amelia, for it has opened her to the advances

of unwanted and shallow suitors, and has overshadowed the true value of her soul. It is notable that this portrait, like the poetic introduction of Sophia in Tom Jones, ends with praise for Amelia's mind rather than her physical charms; Amelia's strength in the face of distress, wounded vanity, and public scorn and humiliation attests to the superiority of her mind. But this information about Amelia's presumably past beauty,[2] her pain and the revelation of her admirable equanimity, does not help the reader resolve her role in the novel ... or does it? From the situation depicted above, which is typical of Amelia's composure through periods of stress, the reader can determine one of two things: first, that Amelia's part is simply to accept stoically all that comes to her; second, that she has the ability to rise above the afflictions placed upon her by Fortune. In other words, throughout the novel she is either essentially static, merely a picture of the ideal wife who remains in the background and suffers long and quietly, or a person capable of changing her world and of influencing others. It is my object to determine how far Amelia

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[2]The state of Amelia's broken nose is never fully elucidated in the novel: at one moment her beauty has disappeared, the next, she is as lovely as ever, attracting every man with whom she comes in contact. Fielding's carelessness with this one detail led to much scornful derision of his heroine, as his enemies declared that her "noselessness" must have come from sexual promiscuity resulting in syphilis.

corresponds with the role of the ideal wife, and to what extent she may be called a heroine in her own right.

* * *

In many ways, it would be simple to accept that Amelia Booth merely realizes the idea of the "angel in the house" and serves no greater purpose in the novel. Like the ethereal "angel" found later in so much of Victorian literature--for example, Agnes Wickfield in Dickens' David Copperfield and Amelia Sedley in Thackeray's Vanity Fair--Amelia is good-tempered, sober, discreet, innocent, and she most definitely conforms to the notion that a woman should remain at home, nurturing her husband and family rather than partaking in the tumult of the outside world. Sheltered, patient, and perpetually overshadowed by her husband's superior education and knowledge of the world, Amelia does indeed seem to be the patriarch's ideal wife. As Angela Smallwood comments:

> [Amelia] lives out to the letter the notion that it is a wife's duty to complement her husband's nature and situation, to comfort and console him, and by her own efforts compensate him for all major and minor distresses-even when these are entirely of his own making. (154)

Amelia fulfils her supportive role as wife to perfection: she is submissive, conciliating, soothing and encouraging of

her husband's every decision as he goes out to face the world on her behalf. She never scolds or presumes to judge her husband's decisions. Even when her opinion differs from Booth's, Amelia admits that he is her superior in discernment, and declares her willingness to defer to him. When she wishes to take on a more active role, she approaches her husband carefully, telling him that, "though my Understanding be much inferiour to yours, I have sometimes had the Happiness of luckily hitting on some Argument which hath afforded you Comfort"(Amelia 179); thus, she preserves Booth's ego, belittles her own thoughts and accomplishments, and announces that all her efforts are concentrated upon making her husband happy. Felicity Nussbaum states that "the formula for the ideal woman of the period [is this]: she was to be a chaste companion who cheerfully created order and fostered domestic serenity"(5). Amelia certainly brings order and stability to Booth's world, and she does so, in part, by acquiescing to his expectations of her, and by admitting her dependence upon him. In fact, Amelia's submission to her husband is one of the traits Fielding finds most admirable about her. His satiric treatment of the learned woman of the novel, Mrs. Bennet/Atkinson, is designed to show how uncomfortable the world can be when a woman

"refuses to perform the natural functions of her sex and ... actively usurps the functions of the male sex"(Nussbaum 43).

Fielding implies, through the negative example of Mrs. Bennet, that Amelia is right to defer to her husband, admit the uselessness of an extensive education in a female, and thus preserve not only her femininity, but the very peace and happiness of her household. His often cruel handling of Mrs. Atkinson, in which he mocks her pretensions to learning, and his unwillingness to portray his heroine as even a potential intellectual, betrays Fielding's conservativism and sexism. Besides cheerfully maintaining her husband's pre-eminence within their family, Amelia is also a perfect mother, guiding her children carefully to moral awareness through her own example:

> This admirable Woman never let a Day pass, without instructing her Children in some Lesson of Religion and Morality. By which Means, she had in their tender Minds so strongly annexed the Ideas of Fear and Shame to every Idea of Evil of which they were susceptible, that it must require great Pains and Length of Habit to separate them. Tho' she was the tenderest of Mothers, she never suffered any Symptom of Malevolence to shew itself in their most trifling Actions without Discouragement, without Rebuke; and if it broke forth with any Rancour, without Punishment. In which she had such Success, that not the least Marks of Pride, Envy, Malice, or Spite discovered itself in any of their little Words or Deeds. (Amelia 167)

Consummately compliant mate, "tenderest of Mothers," paragon of Christian humility and humanity...all these superlatives express Amelia's perfection in fulfilling her duties as a wife. Unfortunately, these traits also appear to be highly conformist and even stereotypical. It seems clear that Fielding's depiction of Amelia is designed more to illustrate how an "ideal" wife would behave under a variety of excruciating circumstances than to delineate the experiences of a genuine person.

* * *

Because Fielding seems often to forget to explore his heroine's personality, or to portray her realistically, it is natural that the reader should see Amelia simply as an idealized character, or merely as a picture of "the good wife". Fielding's difficulty in establishing a believable psychology of his heroine, and the pervasive didacticism of the novel as a whole, prevents the reader from regarding Amelia as a sympathetic character. For example, because Amelia meets every problem with so resolute a mind and controlled a heart, the reader may be tempted to overlook her heroism in favour of calling her unreal, or even un-human. Her reaction to Booth's confession that he has had an affair with Miss Matthews seems to confirm such a viewpoint, because

it is so particularly bloodless: "Indeed, I firmly believe every Word you have said-but I cannot now forgive you the Fault you have confessed-and my Reason is-because I have forgiven it long ago"(498). The agony she must have felt before forgiving her husband goes virtually unrecorded: her frustration, fear and grief are mentioned but once, when Amelia reacts heartbrokenly to the receipt of Colonel James' letter of challenge, which reveals Booth's relationship with Miss Matthews (491-92). That Fielding neglects to explore such a crucial trial in his heroine's life, and that he allows one short monologue of despair and anger to signify the depth of her feelings and personality, shows how incapable he is of portraying his heroine as a realistic and emotionally believable character. At another point, when Amelia attempts to soothe William after he has been snubbed by Colonel James, she tells him,

> let it be a Comfort to my dear *Billy*, that however other Friends may prove false and fickle to him, he hath one Friend, whom no Inconstancy of her own, nor any Change of his Fortune, nor Time, nor Age, nor Sickness, nor any Accident can ever alter; but who will esteem, will love, and doat on him for ever. (175)

Admiration for her loyalty is lessened because the reader is distracted by the rhetorical nature of her speech: her

declaration to Booth is basically a recitation of her marriage vows, and it is delivered in the most artificial language possible. Amelia's heroism, her more-than-human love for her husband and family, and her amazing fortitude are all undermined by Fielding's inability to depict his female protagonist as anything but an ideal woman.

The reader's inability to see Amelia Booth as an individual character is further compounded by the tedious moralizing of the novel as a whole: how can Amelia be anything but an ideal, when she is so often pointed out as *the* example of Christian, and womanly, behaviour? Fielding pointedly measures every other female character in the novel against Amelia, and notes satirically how each falls short of her kindness, her humility, her good-nature, her love. He belabours her perfection almost past the point of endurance, and, ultimately, emphasizes how she fulfils his standards of excellence and embodies his moral convictions at the expense of her humanity. When the narrator relates Amelia's reaction upon Booth's imprisonment for debt, his concentration is absolutely focused upon showing how Amelia lives up to Christian ideals, rather than upon depicting her honest emotions:

> Fortune had attacked [Amelia] with almost the highest Degree of her Malice. She was

> involved in a Scene of most exquisite Distress; and her Husband, her principal Comfort, torn violently from her Arms; yet her Sorrow, however exquisite, was all soft and tender; nor was she without many Consolations. ... Art and Industry, Chance and Friends have often relieved the most distrest Circumstances, and converted them into Opulence. In all these she had Hopes on this Side of the Grave, and perfect Virtue and Innocence gave her the strongest Assurances on the other. (319-20)

Fielding's urgent desire to impress upon the reader the consolation of Christian philosophy draws attention away from the very real distress his heroine must be experiencing. Her goodness and her ability to trust in God become secondary matters to the reader, who has grown to expect, with some boredom, that she will always look upon her situation with cheerful resignation, and will not struggle against her fate. That Amelia's thoughts and feelings are rarely expressed by herself, and are almost always related by a narrator (or husband) devoted to eulogizing her, further distances the reader; she does not even have an active voice in the novel! Fielding seems, in Amelia, to be swept away by his own moralizing, and cannot see that his book and heroine often fail to be engaging as a result: Amelia seems to be merely a passive source of benevolence, rather than an active character.

* * *

Keeping the ancillary role of the angelic wife in mind, and the seemingly static and idealized nature of Amelia's goodness, it is not difficult to understand why many critics contend that Amelia does not center around Mistress Booth at all, but her husband. Certainly, any action in the novel is more likely to originate with William Booth than his wife: while the good Captain is free to defend a helpless stranger, get thrown in jail, have an affair with a woman whom he knows to be an attempted murderess, hide from creditors and later be arrested by them, and gamble away the pittance his family has to survive on (among other, innumerable, mistakes on Booth's part), Amelia minds her children, forgives Booth's indiscretions, supports him faithfully, and maintains her chastity, as an obedient wife should. In short, she is impossibly good and obliging ... an angel. But, has she any greater significance within the novel? Because the climax of Amelia is Captain Booth's transformation from deist to Christian, it may seem reasonable to assume that the novel centres around him and that Amelia plays no larger role than that of a supporting actor. If this were the case, Amelia would be nothing more than a registrar of "exquisite distress"(319), fainting and

going into hysterics whenever the occasion calls for a heightened sentimental impact upon the reader, and a passive example of right to her husband... and, regrettably, these *are* aspects of her role in the novel. I do not, however, believe that by focusing on Billy Booth's moral and spiritual deficiency, the resultant torments his family suffers, and his eventual repentance, Fielding resigns Amelia to a passive and secondary part in the novel, or that he intends for her to be seen as a conventional figure. Indeed, considering how dangerous the world is in which she lives--a place populated almost solely by selfish and conniving persons, and governed by a seemingly resistless corruption--Amelia's goodness cannot conform to orthodox standards: she *must* be an independent and active force, or she would be overcome by the surrounding darkness. At the lowest moments of their life together, when Booth has given up all as lost, Amelia firmly puts aside her hysterics and her maudlin speeches and resolves to act with sense, discretion and valour. Instead of accepting blindly and meekly all that happens to her family, Amelia rises above the limitations placed upon her sex to become an active participant in Booth's trials, facilitating her husband's attempts to find a way out of his debts and despair, and acting as the support of her family.

That Amelia is a person who transcends the limitations of sexual convention is verbalized by Booth, who at one point assures Amelia, "I know on all proper Occasions you can exert a manly Resolution"(369). For all his faults, Booth generally recognizes that his wife is not merely a woman--a person dependent upon him for leadership and strength--but a being capable of rising above her own human nature to become an heroine, and, perhaps, more. As George Sherburn puts it, "Amelia is not merely the idealization of the *Ewig-Weibliche*; she is an embodiment of moral courage-precisely what her husband lacks"("Fielding's *Amelia*: An Interpretation" 149). Because Amelia alone can summon the strength and determination to be patient, humble, faithful and hopeful, only she is capable of ameliorating the awful plight the Booths find themselves in; therefore, she actually plays a more important part in her family's welfare, and in the novel, than her husband.

* * *

The potential conflict between Amelia's role as a submissive and accepting wife, and her part as a strong, decisive and self-supporting heroine is accentuated throughout the novel, as Amelia is repeatedly put in the position of having to choose how best she can rectify, or at

least live with, the problems caused by Booth's heedlessness and ultimately rooted in his moral indeterminacy. The question of how a virtuous woman is to reconcile wifely obedience with the exercise of her own, naturally superior, judgement thus becomes a major issue of Amelia. The first time Amelia is forced to reevaluate the conventional role of a wife occurs when, not far into their married life, William is ordered to take up his position in the army overseas. Initially, Amelia pleads with him to relinquish his ties to the world and remain with her, for she knows she will be disconsolate without him. But, when Doctor Harrison and Booth agree that Booth's honour is at stake in the matter, Amelia desperately tries to find the strength to submit to their opinion. Booth relates to Miss Matthews how his wife came to resign herself to her duty:

> I found her on her knees, a Posture in which I never disturbed her. In a few Minutes she arose, came to me, and embracing me, said, she had been praying for Resolution to support the cruellest Moment she had ever undergone, or could possibly undergo. (Amelia 102)

It is interesting to note that if Booth does not disturb his wife in the midst of her prayers, he also does not join her; it is up to the wife in this family to uphold religion, to relinquish her husband and possibly her future, and to put

her trust in God. At first, Amelia resists her own strength and cannot see beyond her desire to have him near--"the Woman...still prevailing"(102-03) conjures up the liveliest images of her own loneliness and sorrow --but ultimately she is bound by her conscience to shrug off her fears and sensibilities, to rise above her weak human nature and to act the part of an heroine, a part which suits her very well:

> "Go, go my *Billy*; the very Circumstance which made me most dread your Departure [ie. her pregnancy, and the dangers of childbirth], hath perfectly reconciled me to it. I perceive clearly now that I was only wishing to support my own Weakness with your Strength, and to relieve my own Pains at the Price of yours. Believe me, my Love, I am ashamed of myself"(103).

It is obvious that Amelia will do anything for her husband's sake, even embrace want and suffering. Her desire is always to remove care from William's shoulders and to bear his burdens, as well as her own. Though it may seem highly conformist of her to give in to her husband and their friend, and to set her own desires at naught, Amelia's conscious decision to trust to her own strength and faith is, in fact, the first conclusive sign of her innate heroism: she struggles with the "feminine" weakness of her nature, then surrenders to her more courageous self, which, invariably, demands sacrifice and obedience.

Further examples, great and small, of Amelia's heroism are not lacking. When William is injured overseas, she immediately rushes to his side to be with and care for him. Although she must leave one child behind in England and face the delivery of a second in a strange land, and though she forfeits the regard and financial aid of her mother, she joins him without hesitation, knowing that this time at least obedience to her husband--it is, after all, her duty to stand by him--corresponds with obedience to her heart. Clearly, Amelia feels that her love for Booth takes precedence over social conventions, worldly considerations, anyone or anything. To Booth, she at one point declares, "I have a Heart, my *Billy*, which is capable of undergoing any Thing for your Sake; and I hope my Hands are as able to work, as those which have been more inured to it"(436). Amelia's willingness to take on manual labour,--a fact which astounded and disgusted most of Fielding's fashionably-minded female readers, and convinced them once and for all of her "lowness"--testifies to the depth of her love ... and also to her nonconformity: Amelia utterly disregards the dictates of fashionable society which state that gentle women do not work. But Amelia's heroism is not confined to the large moments of life, when desperation forces her to act: when

their little family is together in London avoiding Booth's debtors and struggling to find a way to survive, William gambles away his money while Amelia denies her children tarts for supper and refuses herself the luxury of a glass of wine in order to save six-pence. Moreover, Booth's excesses pass by without reproach as Amelia determines to go to bed early, so that he will not be made to feel guilty by finding her sleepless in his absence. Amelia's actions at all times attest that she will be the perfect wife to Booth, though it may cost her and her children everything:

> my dear *Billy*, let nothing make you uneasy. Heaven will, I doubt not, provide for us and these poor Babes. Great Fortunes are not necessary to Happiness. For my own Part, I can level my Mind with any State; and for those poor little Things, whatever Condition of Life we breed them to, that will be sufficient to maintain them in. How many Thousands abound in Affluence, whose Fortunes are much lower than ours! for it is not from Nature, but from Education and Habit, that our Wants are chiefly derived. Make yourself easy therefore, my dear Love; for you have a Wife who will think herself happy with you, and endeavour to make you so in any Situation. (162)

Amelia can only be obedient to Booth because she is absolutely sure of herself, and because she knows her love empowers and sustains her husband and family: she will *make* William happy, she will accept any condition of life, and she

will be a blessing to them all. Her above declaration to Billy of her willingness to follow him whither he goest, to be content as long as he is near, and to strive to better their lives, contrasts sharply to the selfish and manipulative actions of Mrs. James and Mrs. Ellison, who act as true representatives of their society; *they*, with their hypocrisy, hedonism, and amorality conform to the standards of their society, not Amelia. Love, in fact, makes Amelia an heroine, and obedience seems never to her to conflict with love.

However, her obedience is not merely a given: Amelia expects that she will be consulted upon any decision of her husband's,--alas! if only she were--and that her opinion will have some weight. She also expects that her submission will not be abused. When Booth peremptorily denies his wife the opportunity to go to a masquerade at Ranelagh with Mrs. Ellison, Amelia unconditionally supports him in front of that generous woman, then voices her dissension when they are alone. Refusing to give a motive for his refusal, Booth requires her not to delve deeper into the matter, to accept that his reasons are good and that he has her best interests at heart. To this, she answers: "'I will appeal to yourself, ... whether this be not using me too

much like a Child, and whether I can possibly help being a little offended at it'"(249). As the argument continues, she declares, "If after all this, you still insist on keeping the Secret, I will convince you, I am not ignorant of the Duty of a Wife, by my Obedience; but I cannot help telling you at the same time, you will make me one of the most miserable of Women'"(250). By invoking the duty of a wife instead of offering her unconditional support, Amelia shows how truly upset she is. Whereas she generally accepts that Will knows better than she and puts her faith in his decisions, Amelia here demands not the right to govern herself, but to be recognized as a rational being, and to be trusted. She may accede to his demands, but to have her love imposed upon, and to be told that Booth doubts her judgement, even her ability to listen and comprehend, is a severe affront indeed. Amelia is not a martyr, subscribing unquestioningly to the cause of selfless wifehood and obedience, but a thinking person who wishes to be informed of her husband's motives, and who grants him her obedience as a sign of her faith and fidelity.

When Booth underestimates Amelia's heroic capacity for understanding and submission, as he and Doctor Harrison periodically do, he denies that her obedience is actually a

gift to him, rather than his legal due. Amelia never makes such a mistake.

* * *

Amelia's heroism is not limited to her extraordinary ability to set aside her own expectations and desires in order to comply with Booth's needs and temperament: the maintenance of her innocence in the face of overwhelming evil is nothing short of heroic, as she is assaulted on all sides and called upon to resist every foe to her family's peace. Enemies are everywhere--society is corrupt, based upon a patronage system which allows no poor man of merit to obtain a living; the legal system is brutal and unjust; friends are almost always enemies in disguise; and even the marriage of two people utterly in love with each other is not free from deceit and misunderstanding--and Amelia must defend herself and her family against all sources of opposition. Her heroism is tested over and over again--and not always with purely favourable results--as she is put in the position of having to ward off the foes Booth is too blind or gullible to see, and yet preserve her innocence, her love, and her faith in mankind.

Adultery represents the biggest challenge to Amelia's peace. Indeed, it seems that every time one turns

the page there is a new man lurking in the corners, coveting Booth's wife! Bagillard, Colonel James, the mysterious Lord, all wheedle themselves into the Booths' lives in an attempt to seduce Amelia. When the narrator points out that "as a handsome Wife is the Cause and Cement of many false Friendships, she is often too liable to destroy the real ones,"(339) it becomes clear that no relationship is sacrosanct: friendship and marriage are simply things to be manipulated in order to get one's way. Disturbingly, this quotation also implies that a woman is somehow to blame if her husband's "friends" prove false: her beauty and good nature, simply because they are remarkable, actually promote male lust and subterfuge. The belief that an innocent and beautiful woman must always be on her guard if she is not to prove yet another source of distress for her husband is a major issue in Amelia. The unflattering and patriarchal fear that all women may prove unfaithful--a perpetual theme in Classical literature--is also addressed, and even played upon, by Fielding.

Amelia's chastity is constantly under siege, and in her anxiety to act charitably and to protect Booth from further difficulties, she does not deal with the duplicity of her would-be seducers as effectively as one might expect.

First, she is susceptible to attack: in a rare touch of characterization, Fielding shows that she is responsive to flattery directed toward her or her children, and to the favourable appearances of those with whom she comes in contact. Feelings of gratitude for favours promised or conferred also blind her to the possibility of treachery. It may be easy for her to spot Bagillard as a foe to her chastity, for friendship to Booth can provide but a thin disguise for so thorough and dissolute a rake, but more skilful agents of deceit, such as Lord ____ and Colonel James, who are far more corrupt and wily, are unrecognizable to her: her range of experience does not allow her to see evil where she expects only to see good. As a result, Amelia is easily duped by the ingratiating Mrs. Ellison, and by the gifts and praise the Lord showers on her children. Not until Mrs. Bennet relates her own tragic history of betrayal and loss can Amelia perceive the plot against her. Later, Mrs. Atkinson (formerly Bennet) must again intervene to warn Amelia about the danger represented by Colonel James. Virtue and beauty are easy targets for the wicked, and at times it appears that Amelia's innocence may actually promote the attacks against her, for she is blind to the machinations, much less the existence, of her foes, and therefore incapable

of fending them off. Despite the problems which innocence may engender, Fielding insistently praises the guiltlessness, the guilelessness, of Amelia's mind:

> we must do our best to rescue the Character of our Heroine from the Dulness of Apprehension, which several of our quick-sighted Readers may lay ... heavily to her Charge. ...
>
> it is not because Innocence is more blind than Guilt, that the former often overlooks and tumbles into the Pit, which the latter foresees and avoids. The Truth is, that it is almost impossible Guilt should miss the discovering of all the Snares in its Way; as it is constantly prying closely into every Corner, in order to lay Snares for others. Whereas Innocence, having no such Purpose, walks fearlessly and carelessly through Life; and is consequently liable to tread on the Gins, which Cunning hath laid to entrap it. To speak plainly, and without Allegory or Figure, it is not Want of Sense, but Want of Suspicion by which Innocence is often betrayed. Again, we often admire at the Folly of the Dupe, when we should transfer our whole Surprize to the astonishing Guilt of his Betrayer. (346-47)

Fielding recognizes that the world will call Amelia blameably deficient of suspicion or even sense, and feels he must come to her defence. He makes it clear in this commentary, as in Tom Jones, that it is really a suspicious person who possesses a morally-impaired mind: only one capable of doing evil could imagine that others have set traps for him. Amelia's credulity testifies to the unusual purity of her spirit, rather than her stupidity or folly; she is not a

"dupe," but a good person, incapable of cruelty and deceit. As Mrs. Atkinson says, when she informs Amelia of Colonel James' ulterior motives for friendship, "Sure you would not be so dull in any other Case; but in this, Gratitude, Humility, Modesty, every Virtue shuts your Eyes"(345-46).

Less excusably, and even more realistically, Amelia is also vulnerable to attack because of a want of faith in her husband. After witnessing Booth's heedlessness on so many occasions, it seems reasonable to the reader that Amelia should believe she cannot trust him to act prudently or to put his family's welfare first: his jealousy would certainly overcome his judgement, and then where would she and her children be? It is easy to sympathize with Amelia when the narrator relates that,

> she was reduced to a Dilemma, the most dreadful that can attend a virtuous Woman ... In short, to avoid giving Umbrage to her Husband, *Amelia* was forced to act in a Manner, which she was conscious must give Encouragement to the Colonel: A Situation which, perhaps, requires as great Prudence and Delicacy, as any in which the Heroic Part of the female Character can be exerted.(363)

For once, Amelia's emotions and fears overcome her ideal nature. Her desire to sacrifice her own peace rather than to risk Booth's life may seem admirable, but it also reveals a

serious lack of trust in her husband, and a lamentable willingness to embrace unnecessary hardship. By resorting to William's weak habits of protective deception, Amelia jeopardizes the foundation of their marriage, his faith in her, and risks the loss of her innocence for no conceivable reason. Amelia tries to convince herself that she acts heroically, but she really allows her unwholesome fear for her husband to interfere with the courage and decision she is normally capable of directing towards the solution of their problems. When Booth discover his wife's secrecy, he can ask her with some justice, "Have you dealt fairly with me, *Amelia*?"(436). She has not betrayed him in any way, but her misguided assumptions about heroism not only leave her exposed to attack, but weaken the Booths' relationship.

That Amelia's innocence and love for her husband can survive the disappointment of so many betrayals, and can withstand even the trials she has made, or at least made worse, for herself through her human frailty, is amazing. Of course, it must be admitted that Fielding would not allow the heroine of his novel to be compromised or corrupted: to illustrate his ideal of wifehood, Amelia must be shown to be inviolable, and fate, Mrs. Atkinson, and Doctor Harrison all intervene to assure that she will remain so. It comes as a

positive comfort to find that innocence is attractive not only to predators, who would pervert it, but to worthy people capable of being inspired by it to selfless deeds: Mrs. Atkinson, the ever-devoted Sergeant Atkinson and Doctor Harrison exemplify true friendship in their willingness to help Amelia protect herself. However, Doctor Harrison's letter to Colonel James, which is read aloud and ridiculed mercilessly at the masquerade, should leave no doubt as to Amelia's fidelity, assisted or unassisted:

> You are attacking a Fortress on a Rock; a Chastity so strongly defended, as well by a happy natural Disposition of Mind, as by the strongest Principles of Religion and Virtue, implanted by Education, and nourished and improved by Habit, that the Woman must be invincible even without that firm and constant Affection of her Husband, which would guard a much looser and worse disposed Heart.(415)

Even without the love of her husband, Doctor Harrison declares, Amelia would resolutely defy all evil. She is thus acknowledged by the most obviously patriarchal voice in the novel to possess an independent and indomitable control of herself, despite her sex. It is also implied, because of the general mockery the letter receives from both sexes, that by being virtuous, Amelia is exceptional. The woman who behaves loosely, who follows her "romantic" passions without a notion

of duty, commitment, or sacrifice, and who may seem to the reader to be realistic because of her fallibility, is the woman who truly conforms to her society's rather questionable moral standards and expectations. Miss Matthews declares, "'Desire! ...are there any Bounds to the Desires of Love!'"(155-56), thereby revealing her hedonism and selfishness to the world; Amelia maintains her position as a wife and as a virtuous, self-governing person not by railing against rules and boundaries, but by upholding ideals which Fielding suggests have been cast aside by the thoughtless as staid and conventional. As a person whose virtue demands obedience, self-sacrifice, and love, Amelia is a figure of intense interest, rather than a static representation of goodness: she defies the standards of the world, and emerges victorious as a new ideal of womanhood, in fact, I would argue, as a new ideal for humanity.

* * *

Henry Fielding challenges the mores of his society when he portrays Amelia as an ideal person: in effect, he discards his society's conception of an ideal woman,--a woman who is beautiful, wealthy, carefree and gay--and replaces her with an heroine who is poor, vulnerable, and earnest in her love for her family. By doing so, Fielding makes it apparent

that human value does not depend upon social position, prestige, and all the frippery of an idle and leisurely life, but on self-assurance and self-responsibility. Not only is one's class or station shown to be meaningless without moral behaviour and Christian love, one's sex is proven not to be the determinant of moral strength: through his constant comparison of Booth's weakness and lack of resolve--despite his superior education and knowledge of the world--to Amelia's steadfastness, Fielding attempts to break down the double standard governing the sexes, and to show that moral and virtuous behaviour should be practised by all persons. Fielding's depiction of virtue in an article in The Champion dealing with reputation bears a striking resemblance to Amelia, and reveals his expectations of a worthy person:

> True virtue is of a retired and quiet nature, content with herself, not at all busied in courting the acclamations of the crowd; she is plain and sober in her habit, sure of her innate worth, and therefore neglects to adorn herself with those gaudy colours, which catch the eyes of the giddy multitude. Vice, on the contrary, is of a noisy and boisterous disposition, despising herself, and jealous of the contempt of others, always meditating how she may acquire the applause of the world, gay and flattering in her appearance, certain of her own ill features, and therefore careful by all the tricks of art to impose on and engage the affections of her beholders.
>
> (Vol. XV Works 228)

Though Virtue is here labelled a female entity,--as a matter of written convention--her characteristics are certainly not sexually exclusive. It is implied that every person should behave discreetly and intelligently, after the manner of Virtue. Amelia Booth clearly lives up to the requirements of Virtue, for she is quiet and unassuming, but not passive. If it is true that she spends most of her time at home caring for her children, preparing her husband's meals, and occupying herself with homely tasks, it is also true that it is her decision to do so; she is not a drudge or slave, as so many outraged women of the eighteenth century declared. Like Virtue, Amelia is self-sufficient and prudent; she holds herself apart from the world because her focus in life is upon her family rather than upon seeking general acclamation and praise; in fact, she despises the world's conceptions of power and fame. By comparison with Vice,--whom the libidinous Miss Matthews seems to embody--Virtue is isolated, benevolent, and accepts her station in the world graciously rather than clamouring for pleasure or profit. It is implied throughout Amelia that Booth would benefit from living in the same manner as his wife: her self-abnegation, other-worldliness, and obedience are models to all who would live happily and peacefully under any circumstance.

By depicting Amelia Booth as an ideal woman and wife, Henry Fielding attempts to bring his audience to an awareness of Christian virtue, the necessity for prudence amid the corruption of the world, and the power of moral courage and love. He further emphasizes that though these traits may be traditional ideals of our society, they are rarely discovered in reality ... in either sex. The Biblical portrait of a virtuous woman, upon which Amelia is ultimately based, stresses how unconventional and admirable a devoted and loving woman is:

> Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price *is* far above rubies.
> The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.
> She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.
> She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. ...
> Strength and honour *are* her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.
> She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue *is* the law of kindness.
> She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.
> Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband *also*, and he praiseth her. ...
> Favour *is* deceitful, and beauty *is* vain: *but* a woman *that* feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. (Proverbs 31: 10-12, 25-28, 30)

Henry Fielding honours the idea of the virtuous wife, honours her fidelity, her willingness to work and sacrifice for her

family, her prudent speech, her plain honesty; he therefore sets out to prove in Amelia that the delicate and sacred balance of the family can be preserved only by a female protagonist capable of conforming to traditional models of righteousness. Fielding highlights the nonconformity of such a woman, by displaying how disparate Amelia's aims are from the majority of her sex: unselfish, almost withdrawn from earthly considerations, religious and chaste, she is essentially at variance with the world, which labels her a prude for her modesty and a hypocrite for her lack of ambition. Though the reader might be tempted to call Amelia an unreal character based on a patriarchal system's values and mores, and might further be tempted to condemn Fielding's rather one-dimensional and conservative depiction of his ideal woman, he must nevertheless accept that Amelia Booth is infinitely superior to the norm of female--indeed, human--society as represented by Fielding in this novel, and that, as the preserver and moral center of her family, she is far from inactive and unimportant. In fact, Amelia transcends typical conceptions of womanhood to become an heroine, and, finally, an example of superhuman goodness and love.

CONCLUSION

When Henry Knight Miller classifies Tom Jones as a romance in his book Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* and the Romance Tradition, he emphasizes that "comic romances are quest epics,"(8-9) in which a hero searches "for reputation or love, for a home or for a father, but ultimately ... for maturity, for the defined essence of the soul"(25). The search for identity, stability and peace is a common theme in Fielding's novels, and the reader is encouraged to feel that he, like Tom Jones and William Booth, wanders through a world intent on discovering maturity and moral clarity. However, I am not convinced that the male protagonists' quest for knowledge and self-awareness is the focus of Fielding's novels Tom Jones and Amelia; I should rather say that the heroines in these novels represent the true source of the reader's interest, because they signify the wisdom, maturity, truth and courage that is the end of the human quest for self. They represent the "soul" of humanity.

Of Fielding's characters, male or female, only Amelia Booth and Sophia Western possess the rectitude to be

recognized by him as prototypes for a new and improved humanity and morality. Murial Brittain Williams declares,

> There is a higher morality than social convention and a higher satisfaction than conformity that should lie at the heart of all human conduct ... The foundation of morality is humane feeling and right reason on a purely secular plane; and charity, on the Christian. (6)

Sophy and Amelia are exceptional characters because they embody a morality which meets the standards of the Law, yet also fulfils the requirements of that charity or love which "[b]eareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things"(I Corinthians 13:7). Williams therefore recognizes Amelia and Sophia as profoundly non-conformist, characters who epitomize stability, patience, unconditional love, and obedience to duty, in defiance of the vanity and confusion of the world at large. In accordance with their strength and virtue, Amelia and Sophia play considerable roles in the lives of their men, acting as beacons of innocence and virtue amid a dark, often indifferent, world. However, Amelia and Sophy should not be mistaken for static images of ideal womanhood: first, they are not flawless personalities--they are, thankfully, a little too vain, a little too inclined to displays of emotion (such as swooning and sympathetic sobbing), to be

devoid of individuality; more important, they are portrayed as characters so formidable, loving, and obedient to their perceived Christian duties, that they become, I would argue, the most effective and dynamic characters in their respective novels. Despite the conventional limitations placed upon their sex--limitations which Fielding does not always see fit to remove--and the limitations they place on themselves, these female characters surpass typical conceptions of excellence: Sophia becomes a virtual goddess in her novel, and Amelia recalls Biblical examples of wifely perfection.

As examples of righteousness tempered by charity, Amelia and Sophia set forth the essence of Fielding's ideas of human and Christian virtue; it is through their obedience, graciousness, and forgiving acceptance of others, that they become representatives of the better morality which Fielding hoped to promote in his readers. They also come to represent a new comic ideal, for they are kind, good-natured, and prepared to accept human weakness joyfully in the expectation of future happiness. Thus, Sophia and Amelia, by signifying order, self-abnegation, obedience and charity, prove themselves superior to Henry Fielding's often bitter satire and humour, and set a new standard for a

comedy based upon the peace and satisfaction of the human soul. One wonders if the same standard for comedy, the same determination to prove that everything can come out right under the auspices of a faithful and loving woman, could have been maintained had Fielding lived to write another novel.

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